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POLICY ISSUES: COORDINATION AND COOPERATION WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS

Progress of work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

During November 1994, the IPCC completed its special report to the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, scheduled for 28 March to 7 April 1995 in Berlin. All three IPCC working groups contributed to preparing the report, which contains:

(a) Radiative forcing of climate change 1994, and a summary for policy makers;

(b) Evaluation of the IPCC Emission Scenarios, and a summary for policy makers;

(c) IPCC Phase I Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories;

(d) IPCC Technical Guidelines for Assessing Climate Change Impacts and Adaptations.

Alongside the work leading to the special report for COP.I, IPPC was engaged in the preparation of the IPCC Second Assessment Report, which is expected to be completed during December 1995.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council is invited to take note of the report and members are urged to continue to support the IPCC activities and to contribute to the IPCC Trust Fund.

The Governing Council may also wish to:

Request the Executive Director of UNEP, jointly with the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), to arrange for the continuation of the Panel and to ensure the participation of specialists with appropriate expertise in the activities of the Panel;

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* UNEP/GC.18/1.

Request the Panel to continue to update the assessments of available information on the science, impacts, response options and the technical aspects of the socio-economics of climate change and related methodologies for use and application by nations, Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other interested entities, taking into account in its assessments the needs arising from the special circumstances of the developing countries and countries with economies in transition;

Further request the Panel, through its Chairman, to report to the Governing Council at its nineteenth session on the progress of its activities.

Special Report to the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Convention on Climate Change

1. In its contribution to the special report, Working Group I (science group) prepared an update on the radiative forcing of climate change, taking into account the newest findings on the distribution, sources, sinks and chemistry of major greenhouse gases and anthropogenic aerosols. The section on radiative forcing consists of the following chapters: the carbon cycle and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, sources and sinks of greenhouse gases other than CO_2; atmospheric aerosols and radiative forcing due to greenhouse gases and aerosols; and global warming potentials. The report on radiative forcing of climate change, together with its summary for policy makers, underwent world-wide peer and governmental review, in accordance with IPCC procedures.

2. Working Group I also prepared the three-volume IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories as a contribution to the special report. The volumes comprise: Reporting Instructions, Workbook and a Reference Manual. The Guidelines have been accepted by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC/FCCC) as the interim methodology to help the Parties to the Convention draw up national inventories of emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases not covered by the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its amendments. The Guidelines have been subjected to extensive review and testing in many developed and developing countries.

3. Working Group I organized a series of meetings of lead authors and key contributors for the preparation of its contribution to the special report. Those meetings took place at Irvine (United States), Sevriers (France) and Geneva in January, April and July 1994, respectively. The Group held its fourth session, at Maastricht (Netherlands) in September 1994, to approve the summary for policy makers of its contribution to the special report.

4. Working Group II (impacts and response options) prepared the IPCC Technical Guidelines for Assessing Climate Change Impacts and Adaptations as its contribution to the special report. The Guidelines provide a means for assessing the impacts of potential climate change and of evaluating appropriate adaptations. They are a development of earlier preliminary IPCC work in this field and have been extensively reviewed and tested. The Group met in November 1994 to approve the Guidelines.

5. Working Group III, which is responsible for cross-cutting economic and other issues, prepared an evaluation of the IPCC 1992 scenarios for future emissions of greenhouse gases as its contribution to the special report. The Group recommends the adoption of its suggested procedure for evaluating scenarios, which involves a set of purposes that the scenarios will serve, together with criteria to satisfy these purposes. The Group suggests the following purposes:

(a) As input to evaluating the environmental/climatic consequences of "non-intervention";

(b) As input to evaluating environmental/climatic consequences of intervention;

(c) As input to examining the feasibility and costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from different regions and economic sectors over time;

(d) As input for negotiating possible emission reductions for different countries and geographic regions.

6. The Group concluded that the IPCC scenarios were comprehensive in their coverage of all important greenhouse gases. Further, the scenarios were sufficiently documented to allow their comparison with other scenarios and to be used as input files for climate models.

7. The Group organized a workshop on emission scenario at Fortaleza (Brazil) in April 1994 to help further refine the chapter on emission scenarios. The Group's plenary sessions in the following September and November approved the summary for policy makers of its contribution to the special report.

IPCC Second Assessment Report

8. As part of its assessment responsibilities and in the course of preparing the Second Assessment Report, IPCC is addressing a series of important questions relevant to the Climate Convention. These include: how are different ecological and socio-economic systems sensitive to changes in climate, or can specific rates or thresholds of change be identified which, when exceeded, lead to substantial alterations in the structure and function of those systems? The first step taken by IPCC towards addressing these and many similar questions was to organize a workshop on Article 2 of the Convention at Fortaleza from 17 to 21 October 1994. The workshop took up the issue of how to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system, that level being achieved within a timeframe to: (a) allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change; (b) ensure that food production is not threatened; and (c) enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

9. The meeting of lead authors and key contributors of Working Group I convened at Sigtuna (Sweden) in October and November 1994 produced the first draft of the scientific part of the Second Assessment Report. This was distributed for peer review during December 1994.

10. The fine details for the contents of the contribution of Working Group III to the Second Assessment Report were put together at the Group's lead authors' meeting in Washington, in June 1994. The output of the Washington meeting was supplemented by meetings of smaller drafting groups throughout the year. Further meetings held by the Group in connection with the Second Assessment Report included those on oceans and large lakes, and on coastal zone management, held in November, at Beijing and Nairobi.

11. Through a series of workshops on topics related to the socio-economic aspects of climate change, Working Group III consolidated its contribution to the Assessment Report. The themes for the major workshops convened included: policy instruments; economic models; and equity and social considerations. The workshops also helped to broaden the knowledge base on the socio-economics of climate change. The meeting of lead authors and key contributors held in November at the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis, in Laxenburg, (Austria) assisted further in consolidating the Group's contribution to the Assessment Report.

12. The tenth session of IPCC (Nairobi, 10-12 November 1994) accepted the special report, according to its rules of procedure. At that session IPCC also reviewed progress in the preparation of the Second Assessment Report and approved the IPCC budget for 1995.